

Lecture 1: Roots of Psychology

What is Psychology?

- **Etymology:**
 - *Psyche* = soul (Greek)
 - *Logos* = rational study
 - → Psychology = "The rational study of the soul"
 - Modern psychology = study of human behavior, perception, memory, relationships, cognition, and emotion
 - Psychology is **not** about weighing souls; it's about understanding the **human condition**
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Ancient Roots of Psychology

Plato's Allegory of the Cave

- People chained in a cave watch shadows on a wall, believing them to be reality
- One escapes, discovers light, sun, grass, and true world
- Returns to tell the others—gets rejected as insane
- Key takeaways:
- Our perception is limited and filtered
- Truth is difficult and socially risky
- Personal growth = seeing beyond illusion
- Captures: development, social conformity, awakening

Plato's Allegory of the Chariot

- Charioteer pulled by two horses:
- One noble (aspiration)
- One base/slovenly (desire)
- Represents motivational conflict
- Later mirrored in Freud's ego/id and Jung's shadow
- Life = internal conflict, tug-of-war between higher/lower nature

Heraclitus

- "You can't step in the same river twice"
 - The world and self are constantly changing
 - The **self is a dynamic process**, not a fixed object
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Early Medical Models

- **Humors**: Ancient Greek medicine linked mood to body fluids (e.g. black bile = melancholia = depression)
 - Foundations for later theories of mental illness
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Renaissance Thought

- **Descartes**:
 - *Cogito ergo sum* – "I think, therefore I am"
 - Introduced **mind-body dualism**
 - Mind ≠ body (a view still influencing psychology)
 - Suggested humans have souls, unlike animals
 - Literature also played a role:
 - Freud and others read **Shakespeare, Goethe, Mary Shelley**
 - e.g. Hamlet's "To be or not to be" → Oedipal tension
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Founders of Modern Psychology

Wilhelm Wundt

- German physiologist
- Founded the **first psychology lab**

- Focus: **structuralism** — breaking down mental processes into components
- Collaborated with:
- **Fechner**: *just noticeable difference*
- **Helmholtz**: perception

William James

- American philosopher/psychologist
- Founder of **functionalism**
- Emphasis on purpose/adaptation of mental processes
- Interested in:
- **Habit** (inspired by frog reflexes)
- **Religious experience**, mysticism (via nitrous oxide)
- Ghosts (seriously)
- Wrote *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

Sigmund Freud

- Physician and neurologist
- Founder of **psychoanalysis**
- Key ideas:
- **Talking cure** (via patient Anna O)
- Unconscious mind
- Drives: *Eros* (life) vs *Thanatos* (death)
- Influenced by Schopenhauer & Nietzsche

Ivan Pavlov

- Russian physiologist
- **Classical conditioning**
- Bell + food → dog salivates
- Foundation for **behaviorism**

Behaviorism

- **John Watson**
- Famous *Little Albert* experiment (fear conditioning)
- Left academia → advertising
- **B.F. Skinner**
- **Operant conditioning** (Skinner box)
 - Behavior shaped by reinforcement schedules
- Wrote *Walden Two* (utopian behavioral society)

Attitudes & Measurement

- **L.L. Thurstone**
- Measured **attitudes** using scales
- Laid foundation for modern surveys & evaluations

Social Psychology

- **Kurt Lewin**
- Democratic vs authoritarian vs laissez-faire leadership
- Founded group behavior studies, especially post-WWII

Humanism

- **Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers**
- *Hierarchy of needs*, self-actualization
- Roots of modern therapy and self-help

Cognitive Revolution (1960s–80s)

- Mind as an **information processor**
- Influenced by rise of computers
- Topics: memory, perception, decision-making

Neuroscience Boom (1990s+)

- **Neuroimaging** (fMRI, MEG, EEG)
 - 'Decade of the Brain' → massive funding
 - Mapping brain functions + linking to behavior
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Psychology Today: Multi-Level Analysis

To study something like **depression**, psychologists might look at:

- **Molecular level:** neurotransmitters (e.g. serotonin)
 - **Genetics:** hereditary patterns
 - **Brain structure/function:** fMRI, white matter, etc.
 - **Physiology:** vagus nerve, heart rate, etc.
 - **Cognition:** thought patterns, biases
 - **Self & identity:** self-esteem, personality traits
 - **Relationships:** romantic/family/friend dynamics
 - **Group dynamics:** workplace, teams
 - **Cultural influences:** societal norms
 - **Environment:** light exposure (e.g. SAD)
 - **Spiritual/metaphysical levels** (e.g. Jung's collective unconscious)
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What Makes Psychology a Science?

- Use of the **scientific method**
 - Define clear **constructs** (e.g. happiness, ego threat)
 - Develop **measurements** (surveys, lab procedures)
 - Seek:
 - **Correlation** (what goes with what)
 - **Causation** (experiments: manipulation & control)
 - **Mechanisms** (why something happens)
 - **Moderators** (what changes the effect)
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Fields in Psychology

- **Experimental Psychology** (lab-based)

- **Cognitive Psychology**
 - **Social Psychology**
 - **Personality Psychology**
 - **Developmental Psychology**
 - **Clinical Psychology**
 - **Industrial/Organizational Psychology**
 - **Behavioral Neuroscience**
 - **Cognitive Neuroscience**
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Two Types of Psychology

- **Outside Psychology:** understanding & controlling behavior (e.g. Skinner)
 - **Inside Psychology:** self-growth, self-discovery, healing (e.g. Rogers, Maslow)
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About the Lecturer

- Background: Freudian, philosophical roots → science
 - Studied:
 - **Narcissism, ego threat, self-enhancement**
 - Shamanic medicine, psychedelics, wealth science
 - Collaborated with:
 - **Jean Twenge** (generational change)
 - **Josh Miller** (clinical psychology)
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Final Encouragement

- Don't be intimidated by psychology or science

- Use **Google Scholar**:
- Search “[topic] + review paper” or “meta-analysis”
- Read primary sources—don’t rely solely on interpreters